

Authorization to Solemnize Marriage

British Columbia Conference - United Church of Canada
Policy: Approved, Conference Executive –**October 3rd 2007**

- o for lay people
- o for ordered people who are retired, retained on the role, or in a non pastoral charge ministry

Please Note: For Ordered ministers, including Designated Lay Ministers (Lay Pastoral Ministers (in Training)), who are called or appointed to a pastoral charge, the license to solemnize marriages is automatically granted through the Executive Secretary, and there is no need to make special application. This also applies to a United Church Chaplain of the Canadian Armed Services upon receipt of a request from the Presbytery in which the Chaplain is stationed.

Preamble

The Conference policy for the granting of marriage licenses is motivated by the desire to assist the local pastoral charge (or ministry) in its marriage ministry.

Traditionally, the pastoral charge and its called or appointed ministry have been assisted in their marriage ministry by others licensed to solemnize marriages, mostly ordered ministers. This often happens during holiday times and at other busy times within the congregational life. There continues to be a need in the conference for these services to be available. For the most part these people will be ordered people who have both the training, experience and calling to lead worship and to conduct marriage preparation. However, there will be unusual circumstances when a Pastoral Charge will request a lay person to solemnize a marriage.

Therefore, the policy is intended to be a permissive policy which allows for the pastoral charge to sponsor within its midst other people (ordered and lay) to solemnize marriages.

Some basic understandings

The Pastoral Charge (or Outreach Ministry recognized by a Presbytery), through its Session (or equivalent) has authority for the provision and expression of public worship, of which the Marriage Service is understood.

The Manual Section 153 (a) it shall be the duty of the Session to oversee: the order of public worship, including the service of praise and the use of the church edifice.

The Conference, through the Executive Secretary, has the authority to request from the Department of Vital Statistics through the "Marriage Act", a provincial license for those appointed to carry out such a function.

The Provincial Government through the "Marriage Act" requires that all marriages be recorded in the "Marriage Registry" which is provided to pastoral charges within British Columbia by the BC Government upon the guidance of the Executive Secretary. When the Executive Secretary applies for the marriage registration, the Executive Secretary provides the full name of the minister, their residence, pastoral title, phone number and pastoral charge (or outreach ministry) where the marriage will be recorded. Outreach ministries will be required to obtain its own Marriage Register from the BC Government.

More recently the Provincial Government has provided "Marriage Commissioners" in all parts of the province to conduct marriages by law. This has taken both some pressure off the local Pastoral Charge to provide services and some opportunities to outreach into the community.

Procedures for application to the Conference:

The Official Board (or equivalent) of the Pastoral Charge (or ministry) will seek Presbytery's approval to request the Executive Secretary through the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee to request a license to solemnize marriages for a lay person or ordered person (not called or appointed to the Pastoral Charge) within its bounds.

The Official Board (or equivalent) will assure that the following documented policy and procedures are in place.

1. that the person is a member in good standing within the congregation (or in the case of an Outreach Ministry of the United Church of Canada.)
2. that the Session (or its equivalent) has established guidelines for Marriage Services within its bounds that include their own policies and procedures for at least the following:
 - o The nature and content of any "Marriage Preparation"
 - o The guidelines for whom and where marriage services would be conducted
 - o The guidelines for the content of the marriage services (**It is understood that The Marriage License approved through the United Church of Canada is for the purposes of conducting "Christian Worship", and that the license is not approved for non-religious ceremonies)
 - o The basis of remuneration, and procedure for payment of staff
 - o The availability and oversight of the "Marriage Registry", which is provided to Pastoral Charges by the provincial government
3. that in regard to a request for a lay person the unusual circumstances of the request be carefully outlined and a designated ordered minister be named in conjunction with the local Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee, to provide both training and supervision for the lay person carrying out this function.
4. that the Presbytery through its Pastoral Relations Committee has been consulted and has issued its approval

It is understood that the request for a license to solemnize a marriage, other than for the person in paid accountable ministry in a pastoral charge, is renewed annually. This will be normally done by March 30th of each year though applications would be accepted at other times.

It is further understood that Ministry Personnel not in paid accountable ministries within a Pastoral Charge (or Outreach Ministry) would not hold a license to solemnize a marriage unless it was requested through the local Pastoral Charge (or equivalent) renewable each year upon application.

The policy will come into effect on October 3rd 2007

Practical steps for the Pastoral Charge: prior to March

1. Review your own policies in regard to your marriage ministry, including an assessment of your needs for others as well as your called or appointed minister to solemnize marriages.
2. Contact the retired, retained and other ministers or lay people who might have assisted you in this regard as to their willingness to continue in this way

Practical steps for lay people or ordered people (retired, retained, or other)

1. Reflect upon your own marriage ministry and approach your own pastoral charge in regard to their needs and your availability.

Practical steps for the Presbyteries: prior to March

1. Receive the request for authorization to solemnize marriages from pastoral charges, chaplaincies and outreach ministries.
2. Pastoral Relations Committee shall examine the needs and policies of the pastoral charge (outreach ministry and/or chaplaincy) as well as the circumstances that might warrant such authorization and make appropriate recommendations to the Presbytery.
3. Pastoral Relations Committee shall determine the suitability of the candidate for whom the authorization has been requested and make appropriate recommendations to the Presbytery.
4. Presbytery shall by noting in the minutes the make a decision concerning the request and forward to the Conference if appropriate.

A ruling by the General Secretary that where a minister is in a pastoral relationship with a Congregation, the minister must always comply with that Congregation's policies in all marriage ceremonies conducted by that minister.